

Jasmine Alicea

Parent Educator, Hispanic Health Council- Mi Casa Campus.

Good evening, esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jasmine Alicea and I am a Parent Educator with Hispanic Health Council- Mi Casa Campus, representing the Family Resource Center at Dwight/Belizzi. I thank you for your time tonight, and your willingness to discuss a matter which is very close to my heart.

In 1994, the Commission for Educational Excellence in Connecticut issued a report noting that less than one third of minority students in CT had met proficiency levels on standardized tests, compared with more than three fourths of white students. The Commission had been formed in response to Sheff vs. O'Neil which cited racial isolation as the reason for such a significant disparity. The following years saw many changes made in order to address this problem. The Commission, which later became the CT Council for Education Reform, in conjunction with the Achievement Gap Task Force have been hard at work creating real change in this area but even so, we've forgotten something. The Achievement Gap is also a Resource Gap.

Family Resource Centers serve the needs of whole families, addressing their needs using a strength-based model proven to empower them. From the birth of their children, we in Family Resource Centers connect families to resources within the local and school communities, provide early assessments and home visitation and key educational experiences. FRC's focus on intervention and prevention of the issues facing all families. In Hartford especially we have the opportunity to address the issues of families facing homelessness, hunger, underemployment and domestic violence each and every single day. For such families, a trip to the Family Resource Center is not only an opportunity to learn about their children's development, or their own but it may also be the only time they eat that day. It could be the difference between having a coat for the winter or freezing.

We serve as a point of entry to the school system for many families, giving children the best possible chance at success in their education. In an area where the achievement gap is so apparent it is imperative to give families every possible opportunity to be active in the education of their children, a venture that begins long before they ever step into the classroom.

We ask you to reconsider the proposal for a block grant and maintain funding at \$109,000 per site or \$8 million for all 74 FRC's. The work of family resource centers is long reaching and we're very fortunate to have come so far on the funds that we've been given thus far. What we are asking you to do today is to consider the impact of the Family Resource Center on our communities before removing the line item, which would be detrimental to our capacity to serve. Understand the difference that we make on daily basis. To lose the FRC is to create a vacuum and our families deserve more.